ontario looks at the family

a public discussion on the family as a focus for social policy

Margaret Birch
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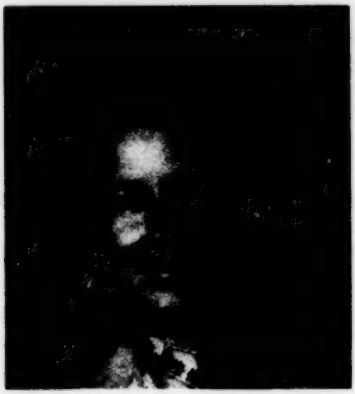
Ontario



It gives me great pleasure to publish this report of our conferences on the state of family life in Ontario.

When we began our series of meetings across the province we hoped to be able to talk to people from all walks of life, and not only to those who assist families but, more importantly, to family members themselves.

That we did, and in their frank discussions are reflected a variety of viewpoints, concerns, and feelings. As I listened and spoke with individuals from Geraldton, Pembroke, Leamington, Kapuskasing, and many other towns and rural areas of Ontario, I was impressed with their strength of commitment to the family and their recognition of a need to enhance its place in society.

I hope this record of the conferences will be of interest to all those who care about Ontario's families.

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We are all aware of the pressures on the family, but it is not mere sentiment to praise the strengths, to remember what 'family' has meant to us personally and to our way of life. The comfort and support families give so freely is the core of comfort most of us carry throughout our lives.
- Margaret Birch

THE CONFERENCES AND COMMUNITY MEETINGS

In May 1979 the Honourable Margaret Birch, Provincial Secretary for Social Development, issued a discussion paper entitled The Family as a Focus for Social Policy, which examined the family from many points of view. Prepared in consultation with interested religious, service, and volunteer organizations, it pointed out that the family was our most important social institution and proposed that it should be a focus for social policy in Ontario.

The paper led to the idea of a province-wide discussion on the family. Individuals and organizations in various Ontario communities would be encouraged to discuss the strengths of family life and to share their views with government and other institutions.

A provincial conference on the family held in Toronto on 24 September 1979 set the process in motion, identified a number of major themes, and acted as an initial clearing house for information and ideas. The first of four regional conferences was held in Kingston (southeastern Ontario) on 1 December, with London (southwestern Ontario),

Thunder Bay (northwestern Ontario), and North Bay (northeastern Ontario) following on 12 April, 3 May, and 14 June 1980.

A major purpose in these meetings throughout Ontario is to reach out to families - to those who in their daily lives encounter the real experiences of family life. I will not call these the 'ordinary' families of Ontario, because there is nothing 'ordinary' about them. Rather, these are the families who have something 'special' to offer us, in good advice and practical common sense and sensitive perceptions.
- Margaret Birch

A goal was to ensure local community involvement in the conferences. For each conference, therefore, Mrs Birch invited a local person to be co-chairman with her and appointed a planning committee to take charge of organization and format. Co-chairman of the Toronto Conference was Judge Guy Goulard, then president of the Ontario Welfare Council; of the Kingston conference, Jim Clark, an alderman and teacher in a community college; of the London conference, Annabelle Logan, board member of the Family and Children's Services Agency; of the Thunder Bay conference, Mary Lou Curtis, a prominent volunteer in community activities; and of the North Bay conference, Marie Marchand, an active community volunteer. The planning committees were chosen from board and staff members of the agencies and organizations that had helped in the preparation of the original discussion paper and from volunteers outstanding in community organizations that assist families.

The planning committee chose the date of the conference, the place, program, and format. The keynote speakers were then invited and the topics proposed for the discussion groups and workshops. The planning committee also identified workshop leaders and recorders of discussions, who were

then formally invited to act in those capacities. The committee chose the theme for each conference, and the topics for discussion were selected on the basis of community and family needs. The five conference programs reflected the different local concerns. At the Thunder Bay Conference a children's discussion group was held, with participants aged 8 to 14; their comments reinforced many of those made in the other discussion groups.

The intention was to have families themselves talk about issues of concern to them. The conferences were open to the public. Personal invitations signed by both the minister and the co-chairman were sent to prospective participants, whose names were taken from the mailing lists available to the Secretariat and to various government ministries and from other lists provided by the members of each planning committee, such as all churches in the area. Advertisements were placed in daily and weekly newspapers; news releases were sent to the media; radio and television announcements encouraged people to attend the meetings. All the media materials promoted 'family participation' and encouraged families to attend as well as professionals.

The conferences drew more than 250 participants each on average. The atmosphere was enthusiastic and informal. Keynote speeches were kept to a minimum, because family members were not invited to be 'talked at'. They spoke for themselves in the discussion groups, which were held in separate rooms and were kept to ten or twelve participants, including the discussion leader and recorder. Chairs were arranged in a circle, and discussion leaders were asked to lead the discussion but not to make a presentation.

Discussion leaders were chosen in part for their knowledge of the subject being discussed, but more for their ability to elicit comments and viewpoints from the participants. A great deal of learning and mutual sharing took place in the discussion groups, where many of the comments came from the heart.

Participants at these conferences were encouraged to return to their communities and continue the discussion among themselves, their colleagues, neighbours, and families, and to make their views known to the government and to the agencies and institutions involved with family life.

The discussions in the groups were lively, productive, and intensely personal, a matter that will probably not be recorded. We all have some experience with families, and we are all interested in discussing them, sharing them, and understanding them, with some passion and intensity.

There was, as one might have surmised, a good deal of mutual counselling taking place. I witnessed some visible expressions of relief as individuals discovered that problems of intense concern to them were not unique or confined to their own particular families. They found others who had experienced similar problems, solved them, or simply survived them. There was so much of that experience to be found, and so much apparent need for it, that one wonders whether there are any other opportunities in ordinary daily life for us to talk dispassionately about our family experiences.
- Alan Thomas

I believe that looking at issues from the point of view of families may involve evaluating certain strongly held principles or positions. Whether this affects a large government ministry or a small volunteer group, the process will not be easy or comfortable. That is usually the case with anything worth doing.
- Margaret Birch

A DISCUSSION ON FAMILY VALUES

a summary of the conference discussions

When you think about the process in which we are engaged; the trust and the sincerity of the request for advice; the warmth and intensity of the feeling among all of us that has grown steadily throughout the day; the mixture of hesitancy and commitment in revealing some personal experiences; the confidence that other people actually listened, and actually cared - could we not say that we have demonstrated and experienced some of the very values and behaviour that we believe to be at the heart of our beliefs about the nature of families? Then isn't it to models of this kind of experience that we should look for these renewed assertions we have been making and must continue to make?
- Alan Thomas

In all about 1300 family members of all ages and all walks of life shared their feelings and experience in the workshop discussions at the five regional conferences. The following summary records their personal and varied (and sometimes conflicting) views of the relationships between families and the support systems provided for them by society.

Some general themes emerged. For instance the opinion was frequently expressed that it is best for children if one parent, usually assumed to be the mother, works at home, especially when the children are very young. Another concern voiced in almost every discussion group was the transference of responsibility for the individual from the family to agencies and professionals. It was noted that there has been a tendency to move from families helping themselves to government and other agencies helping individuals. The professional social worker frequently replaces the relative as the family counsellor. And yet the family remains a great untapped resource.

The relationship between personal responsibility for one's family and the responsibility assumed by agencies that help families in need is complex, but suggestions were made about how families could be encouraged to assume more personal responsibility. It was suggested that families should play an active role in the institutions and organizations that assist families and that family members should be involved in the decision-making process. It was felt that families tend to give too much responsibility to other institutions - to the churches for moral guidance and to the schools for social values and sex education, for example. When responsibility has been turned over in this way to 'experts', family members lose confidence in their personal skills and knowledge. It was urged that parents should reclaim some of the responsibility they have allowed institutions to assume. In turn, professionals should seek to give mothers and other family members self-confidence.

EDUCATION: A COMMUNITY EFFORT

In some cases it was felt that an institution had become too zealous, forgetting that the primary responsibility was with the family. Nowhere did families feel this more keenly than in the education of their children. Some seminar participants said that their children's teachers discouraged parental involvement. Once the school took over they felt the child was no longer theirs, and they found it hard to have to compete with the authority of the teacher, whose personal influence on children can be far more important than curriculum content. Participants felt that teachers should not interfere with the way their students are being brought up (unless a child is being harmed in some way). It was suggested that the school should be considered more as an extension of the family, that families and schools should and could work together.

Parents must be reinvested with their power and effectiveness.
- Lucien A. Beaulieu

There was no question that communication between parents and teachers is vital, especially in sensitive curriculum areas such as sex education and family values. Some parents thought that far too much responsibility was sometimes given to children with far too little guidance, as for example in choosing courses at school. It was also proposed that more courses be given to deal with children's feelings and self-awareness and to prepare them for adulthood in a changing society, where several careers may be pursued in a lifetime. A parent concerned about what is being taught perhaps should be able to attend classes as an observer. It was felt that parent groups (such as the Home and School Associations, Parent-Teacher Associations,

and volunteer programs) can be effective and helpful in complementing the efforts of teachers.

There is not an image of the family to be found anywhere that does not display its importance as a vehicle for individual learning.
- Alan Thomas

The school as a community centre

Some participants observed that the school can be more than a 'learning institution'. It can also act as a family community centre. Schools promoting multicultural activities improve family and community ties and decrease the segregation of individual children. In becoming involved with the community to a greater extent, schools assist self-help groups working with single-parent families. Family activities for children and parents held at school after hours make use of existing facilities and allow parents to meet other parents in the community.

What has happened to family time?
- Margaret Birch

Schools due to be closed might be considered for use as family social centres. In northern communities, rather than sending children far away by bus, it was felt that schools should be kept open. Busing not only excludes children from extracurricular activities, but closing the school often means, in effect, closing the local community centre.

Family and community organizations could approach local schools and departments of parks and recreation and request the initiation of family programs in empty classrooms and underused playgrounds. Family groups could organize casual sports so that organized competitive sports are not the only options.

Education for parenting

It was often mentioned that parents suffer much stress today: the lack of support from an extended family, the abundance of contradictory advice by supposed experts, the scarcity of courses on parenting skills, and the arguments about the mother working inside or outside the home were among the most commonly identified sources of conflict. In large part, however, parenting can be a long and tiring process, and participants felt that prospective parents should be aware of the realities of the task. There was a general agreement at all the conferences that education in parenting skills was important, especially as a preventive measure. In this, the preparation of teenagers for parenthood was felt to be crucial.

If we are to manage role exchanges so that both the partners and the society may benefit from a wider contribution of their abilities; if we are to provide effectively for not only children but older adults and disabled adults within our families; if we are to do all those things, then obviously there are some things that have to be learned.
- Alan Thomas

It was recognized that the most important parenting skills are learned within the family. Yet family-life courses that focus on parenting were felt to be badly needed in the schools. Most seminar participants who addressed this subject thought that such courses should be mandatory and should start in the elementary grades. It was urged that more courses be provided to teach young people how to become good leaders in family activities.

It was suggested that family-life education should deal with personal self-respect as well as with child-rearing and money management. In

teaching parenting skills, the thrust should be on the variety of ways of parenting, and information should be included on all phases of child-raising, including prenatal care. When day care facilities are located in the school, students get practical experience while helping in the day care program. Such an approach teaches both boys and girls parenting skills and might help eliminate stereotyping of parental roles. Family members were encouraged to share in planning such programs and contribute their skills and experience.

The fundamental support for our learning as human individuals about the family must be done by families.
- Alan Thomas

For the adult, most family life and parenting skills education can be obtained through courses organized at the local level by community organizations and churches. A number of suggestions were made: adult classes could be presented in high schools and community colleges; counselling courses on parenting could follow prenatal classes; marriage enrichment courses involving all family members could be supported. One suggestion was that education in family-life and parenting skills should be free for low-income families who could not afford the fees. More films should be made about parenting, and they should be widely advertised and available in all communities.

Churches have long pioneered family-centred courses, activities, and counselling, and it was suggested that they should be supported in their efforts. One proposal was that churches sponsor media advertisements with such messages as 'slow down and listen to your children'. Some concern was expressed, however, that churches might be too judgmental about marriage breakdown, alienating the very people who need their understanding. Some

participants said that it might be helpful if churches were to update their family counselling and develop programs on parental issues that would educate their congregations about the reality of the changes in family life.

I suspect one consequence of our 'professionalization' of the family has been to foster feelings of anxiety about marriage and parenting in our younger generation. I suspect that many young couples hesitate to establish a family because the responsibilities which are involved have come to seem so ominous and imposing. Some of the blame for that can be traced directly to the attitudes of some child-care professionals who appear to believe that our most realistic expectation for our children is that we will fail them ... We are allowing ourselves to feel incompetent about parenting when historically we have reason to feel proud of the sensitive, nurturing qualities which have developed in traditional family life.
- Keith C. Norton

In the end, it was emphasized that families learn from one another, and participants felt that family members should be encouraged to get together to solve their own problems. Self-help and discussion groups can be more beneficial than many agencies to strengthen family life and help teach parenting skills.

It's the responsiblity of all of us individually to ensure that there is a better life for the family.
- Guy Goulard

ADOLESCENT PARENTS

Adolescents are maturing sooner physically but not emotionally, and the problems associated with

adolescent parenthood were the subject of concerned discussion. It was felt that a more sensitive attitude to teenage pregnancies and a better support system for young mothers are badly needed. It was agreed that if agencies such as schools and churches judge youth too harshly, they could alienate them from society and family.

Some believed that the first priority is the prevention of unwanted pregnancies. Although participants acknowledged parental opposition, it was felt that sex education was desirable in Grades 9 and 10, when children become sexually active. Another suggestion was to use the media to advertise that it is not fashionable to get pregnant - television celebrities promoting 'non-pregnancies' in the United States was cited as an example.

Participants recommended that a pregnant teenager be helped to make an informed decision about the future of her child. Exposure to young children through helping in a day care centre and counselling were considered beneficial. Young parents could talk with those contemplating parenthood, sharing information about the realities of parenting in an atmosphere of support. Co-operative group homes or apartments for young single parents or couples where the responsibilities of parenthood could be shared were seen as helpful.

SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

Of the more than 200 000 single-parent families in Ontario, more than 83 per cent are led by women, and slightly more than half of these need public assistance. The subject of single-parent families evoked emotional discussions about preserving family well-being under very difficult emotional and financial circumstances. The need for understanding and support was clear.

It was noted that single-parent families feel vulnerable to a punitive public attitude, reflected

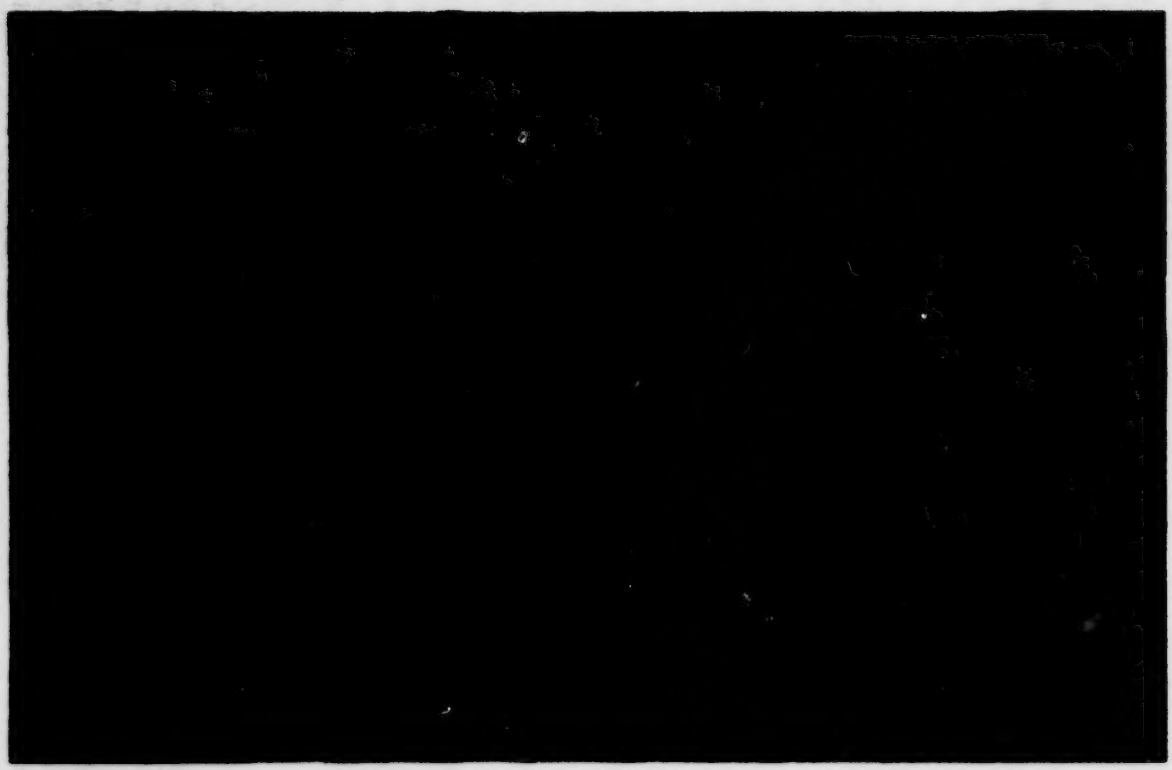
in the stereotype of the single parent conveyed in the media, in the seeming indifference of churches and other institutions, and in the sometimes demeaning treatment on the part of agencies. It was felt that the groups involved should become better informed of single-parent family realities and needs and should adopt a more sensitive and helpful - a more realistic - approach in the support services that they offer.

Certainly some of our gravest social problems stem from single-parent families ... There is a real need for more creative thought and action in this area.
- *Margaret Birch*

Participants observed that the most pressing need in single-parent families was financial and was felt by those receiving Family Benefits or existing on low incomes. It was noted that the process of trying to obtain support is drawn-out and expensive; single mothers are not eligible for Family Benefits during a paternity suit; and alimony payments are fully taxed. It was suggested that the existing eligibility for free OHIP coverage for low-income families be re-examined. Adequate housing could be made available to low-income families and, together with financial help, to those in need of emergency assistance.

Some groups mentioned that many single parents on government assistance, almost all of them women, would prefer to be employed but have a hard time finding jobs because of inadequate education and training. Vocational counselling and job training programs help provide both working and non-working single parents with better employment opportunities. However, one discussion group questioned whether the parent of very young children on Family Benefits should be encouraged to work outside the home.

It was further observed that the employed



The younger family members join in

single parent has to contend with other problems. If newly hired, the single parent may have difficulty finding affordable day care; if employed, the single parent may have difficulty holding a job because of having to stay home to care for a sick child and other family responsibilities. Consequently, the need for subsidized day care and other services required to help the employed single parent was a significant part of the workshop discussions.

Ultimately, as with other groups, it was felt that single parents can best help one another, that voluntary and self-help groups should be encouraged and opportunities provided for single parents to get together.

The family is critical: this we have said so often. The family is changing: this is evident. The family needs society's help: this we acknowledge.
- Frank Turner

DAY CARE

Participants felt that day care was important not only to the parent who worked outside the home but also to the parent who chose to stay at home. Most parents today lack an extended family and cannot rely on relatives. For them, day care can provide free time and relieve the tedium of pre-school care that most parents experience. At some time or other most families need help, and day care was frequently mentioned as an aid rather than an alternative to parenting. Approved home day care (or private day care) facilities exist but should be improved and expanded, particularly because they allow siblings of different ages to be left in one place.

Some participants also observed that co-operative day care centres or play schools serve parents in need of free time and at the same time

provide an opportunity for children to socialize.

Full-time day care was identified as an essential support service for families where both parents must work and in particular for one-parent families where the parent works. Flexible day care is needed for shift workers and parents of school-age children who require care before and after school, during lunch, and on professional development days.

More day care at a reasonable cost to families was often requested. In many cases working mothers cannot afford day care unless it is subsidized. Several people observed that the amount by which day care fees exceed the subsidies available is a hardship for many families. It was also noted that the full cost of day care cannot be deducted from income tax.

It is difficult and expensive to set up a day care centre, and it was suggested that with government support and co-operation more day care facilities could be made available in large business concerns, schools, and church buildings. Locating day care facilities in the workplace or in empty classrooms of neighbourhood schools would help solve the problem of transportation to and from day care centres.

As surrogate parents, day care workers were believed to need improved training in parenting skills as well as higher salaries to attract people to do the job.

YOUNGER FAMILY MEMBERS

The problems and welfare of children were never far from the thoughts of the discussion group participants, as their comments reveal. A children's discussion group at the Thunder Bay conference, however, offered an insight into family life as experienced by those aged 8 to 14 years. Their views tended to give some positive emotional reinforcement to the opinions expressed throughout the conferences by the adults.

The children defined the family as based

on a bond of respect, love and sharing:

- a group of people that have the same parents, bound together by respect;
- a group of people who love each other and care about each other;
- a group of individuals;
- people who do things together and share their thoughts and ideas.

Family life for these children was largely a question of relations with parents, rather than relations between siblings or between the family as a whole and outsiders. Their comments outlined gently certain ways in which parents ought to respect children's rights and other ways in which parents could provide a comforting and supportive environment; the comments did not move from children's needs to children's responsibilities.

It was observed that children have a right to have money and should be allowed to make more decisions so that they can become more responsible. Children have a right to play where they can learn for themselves instead of following parents' instructions. They felt children often needed more space for themselves, that parents can be overprotective. A 'perfect' family, it was suggested, gave both parents and children time to themselves.

The right to be consulted was mentioned several times. Punishment, for example, should be given only after the child has been consulted about what would be best. Parents adopting or fostering another child should consult their natural children first, it was argued, and adopted children have the right to know who their parents are.

Communication within the family was a central theme. Parents, it was suggested, should talk to the children about problems such as divorce, death, and illness. In fact, it was proposed that the children's role in a divorce be discussed with

them before any decisions were made. Time with parents was seen by some to be very important too; parents should not put their work before their children, and at least one parent should be at home with children unless there is a serious financial problem. The company of older people, such as grandparents, was thought to be important. In general, children felt the need of love to grow, the need of someone who cares about what and how they are doing, someone who will provide guidance when they could do something dangerous or wrong. The family was clearly seen as their source of support.

OLDER FAMILY MEMBERS

To their family and community the elderly bring culture, tradition, maturity, and experience, yet they can also suffer from a lack of activity and stimulation, compulsory retirement, low income, and negative stereotypes of the aged. Generally, conference participants felt that there should be more concern about the elderly, and specifically that their legal rights should be investigated and developed. It was suggested that there should be more of a co-operative effort between family and community in serving the needs of senior citizens, a sharing of responsibility among family, church, media, and social service and community agencies.

Retirement

Some conference participants felt that retirement, often a time of stress and personal crisis, should not be mandatory; rather there should be the opportunity to retire early or late. Government, business, and labour might provide much needed pre-retirement counselling services, in which churches, libraries, and schools could help as well.

The difficulty of coping on a low income was

discussed, particularly in times of inflation. All pensions should be indexed to the cost of living, it was agreed.

Community involvement

A mobile society separates the elderly from their families. Long-distance telephone clubs, offering special rates and discounts, could improve communication between family members who live apart. As age increases, the circle of friends tends to decrease. The elderly need to find means of establishing new friends, and it was felt that more involvement in the community should be encouraged. Special transportation services are sometimes needed if the elderly are to participate in community activities.

Interaction between the old and the young was seen as beneficial. Intergenerational programs are a way for seniors to pass along positive living skills to the young. The elderly could be invited into schools and churches to teach. Day care centres could be opened in senior apartments and homes.

One overriding aspect of the present-day population is that families are growing old. We are an aging population; we are becoming progressively more so. By the year 2001 there will be as many people over 65 in Canada as under 16. This is a sobering statistic in view of the network of social services that has been built up, which so heavily depends upon the tax structure for support. This is an aspect of the family and of society that no one, young or old, can afford to ignore or forget.
- Lin Good

Housing

Seniors should be able to stay in their own homes as long as possible, most participants believed, and to make that feasible senior citizens' apartments and rent supplements are needed. Some suggested it would be less disruptive and less expensive to subsidize them in their own homes than to pay for the high cost of institutional care. Support services such as meals-on-wheels, visiting homemakers, home maintenance, repair, and cleaning services help make an independent life feasible. Senior citizens' apartments attached to or located near nursing homes ensure that care is available when needed. 'Buddy' telephone systems ensure that the elderly person living alone is checked regularly to make sure that everything is all right.

If we reflect on the population trends in this country, basically one of an aging population, then perhaps we need to put more emphasis on meeting the demands of families determined to contain two or three generations within their daily existence.
- Alan Thomas

When the older family member is no longer able to live alone, family care was felt to be preferable to institutional care. Rather than having the older parent placed in an already overcrowded institution, it was felt that incentives could be provided to families to make space for grandparents in their homes. In the future a family group may bridge three, four, and possibly five generations because of increased longevity, a fact that could create problems for some families. Conference participants recognized that the strain on families providing care can be devastating and that families could be helped by day care programs and vacation care. An alternative between institutional and home care is private group homes, but concern was expressed about the standard of care available.

Fewer and fewer people die in the familiar surroundings of home or in the company of family and friends. At that time of life when there is perhaps the greatest need for human warmth and comfort, the dying patient is kept company by cardiac pacemakers and defibrillators, respirators, aspirators, oxygenators, catheters, and his intravenous drip.
- Janet Maclachlan

THE DISABLED FAMILY MEMBER

It was generally felt that professionals, parents, and the community need to be better informed about the problems encountered by disabled people. Those involved with disabled persons should be more aware of the resources available. Families who keep a disabled child or adult at home do not always know of the available resources and sometimes receive only partial services.

More contact between disabled and non-disabled people would create greater understanding. It was felt that disabled children should be integrated into the regular school system when possible. Children with hidden disabilities such as deafness or perceptual problems face social difficulties that would be lessened with improved public education.

It was suggested that disabled people would benefit if good medical management under universal health coverage, early diagnosis of disabilities, and the necessary research funding were more readily available.

Family relief

Families should be kept together if possible and encouraged to maintain a disabled child or older member so that institutionalization can be avoided. Families need emotional and financial support to

continue assisting disabled family members at home. Relief can be provided reciprocally between families or by institutions through day or weekend relief programs. Volunteer babysitting, day care, and other 'time out' activities help reduce parental stress. Professionals and others could visit disabled persons in their homes to assist in meals, dressing, toileting, and other details of daily care. In this area the extended family concept can be particularly important. Counselling and support were felt to be needed for all family members so that the transition of the disabled member to institutional care can be made with ease and dignity, when family care is no longer adequate.

Housing and transportation

Buildings are becoming more accessible, but it was felt there should be more consultation with the disabled community at the planning stage in building construction and renovation.

Housing for disabled people is often distant from community facilities and services, so that transportation becomes a problem. Conference participants noted the lack of transportation for disabled people, especially in rural areas, and agreed that the expense of arranging it can make employment and social activities virtually impossible.

Employment

At the best of times people with disabilities have difficulty obtaining employment, and even more so during an economic slowdown. In such circumstances only exceptional disabled people are hired. A negative income tax guaranteeing an income was proposed for those who can only work part-time. It was also noted that many developmental centres and workshops for disabled people do not have ready access to professionals such as physical and occupational

therapists and counsellors. It was believed by many that disabled people should be able to join the regular work force and receive the same pay as those who are not disabled; the government could encourage this by subsidizing the costs of the difference in productivity.

THE LAW AND THE FAMILY

Although laws must serve families with special needs in special circumstances, group participants cautioned lawmakers not to lose sight of the needs of traditional families. It was noted that some laws help and some laws hinder the family, and that in our society the rights of the individual tend to be stressed over those of the family.

Overall, the participants felt that the law must reflect the concept that people are responsible for their own actions. People, particularly the young, lose respect for the law when it is not properly enforced.

One concern noted was that too rigid an interpretation of a law can defeat the policy behind it. Group members felt that the law needs to be written in language that is understandable and accessible to everyone.

Separation and divorce

It was suggested that government make rules for marriage as well as for divorce: 'marriage should be more difficult to enter and harder to leave'.

Many do not realize that divorce is not the only choice available, and it was felt that counselling services are helpful for families.

Some recommended that all aspects of separation and divorce be handled in one court and each time a particular case appeared it be heard by the same judge. Divorce proceedings tend to emphasize rights rather than responsibilities, and some suggested that the law should be changed so that public authorities can enforce maintenance orders.

Custody

Group participants felt that the role of children in a divorce proceeding should be discussed with them before any decisions are made and custody should be granted only after a complete investigation. Police officers should be able to return children to the parent who has legal custody and to charge the offending parent.

Another suggestion was to eliminate some of the red tape involved in adoption and make it easier for foster parents to adopt 'their' child.

Some believed that it should be made easier for out-of-province grandparents to receive custody of their grandchildren upon the death of the parents.

Protection

Concern was expressed regarding the legal rights of those in need of special protection: the young, the disabled, the elderly.

The rights of women were also discussed, leading to specific discussion of the special problems of battered wives and rape victims. It was felt that rape should be considered an assault under the law.

Teenagers and the law

Another area of general concern was the law as it affects teenagers. A criminal record at age 16 for some relatively minor offence was felt to be neither appropriate nor helpful, and it was suggested that the age at which a child receives an adult punishment should suit the nature of the crime.

The problems of teenage alcohol and drug consumption were discussed. It was thought that stiffer penalties for serving alcohol to minors, for consumption of alcohol by minors, and for other alcohol-related offences might help. Solvent sniffing - felt by one group to be a fairly widespread

problem (especially in northern Ontario) beginning when children are 8 or 9 - should be made illegal for minors. The pros and cons of decriminalization of laws regarding the possession of marijuana were discussed with no clear consensus reached.

Concern was expressed about the legal position of 16- to 18-year olds. They may find little support in attempting to leave an intolerable family situation because they are too old to qualify for help from Children's Aid Societies.

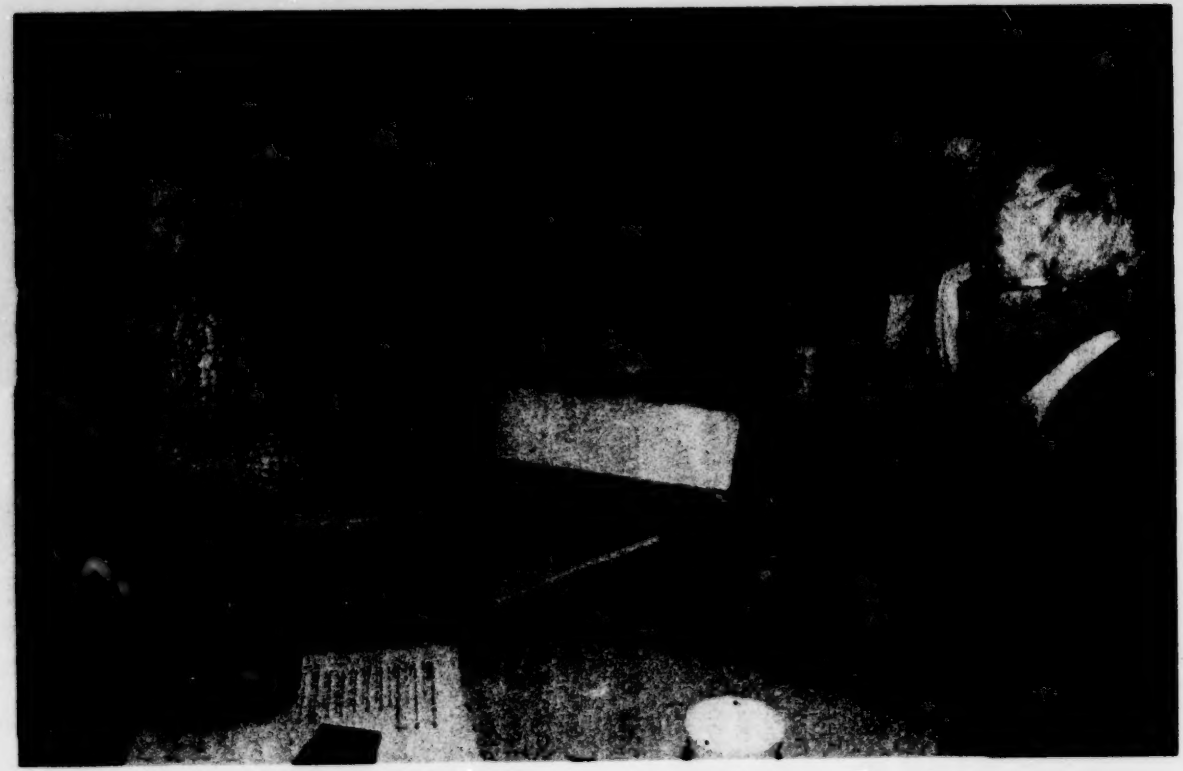
It was mentioned that according to the Marriage Act retarded or mentally incompetent young persons may be refused a marriage licence if they are thought to be incapable of exercising mature judgment. Such young persons, however, might still be able to understand how they wish to live and may deserve to be given more responsibility.

THE ECONOMY AND THE FAMILY

Conference participants agreed that our materialistic society places a high value on money and possessions. Television and advertising promote unreal expectations about the acquisition of luxury. The 'good life' portrayed by the media can lead to a distorted system of values in which people can scarcely distinguish between needs and luxuries.

However, the problems created by high unemployment, continuing inflation, and escalating mortgage rates were at the centre of attention. Families are being strained by debt, by low and fixed incomes, and by unemployment. Many families need two incomes, and both parents must work outside the home. It was generally felt beneficial that one parent remain at home while the children are young. Ideally, families would be able to afford this if they chose. Participants agreed that encouragement and support should be given to having one parent stay at home, possibly through income tax incentives.

An adequate income being important for healthy



A discussion group at the London conference

family relationships, it was questioned whether, with inflation, government assistance levels were high enough and whether assistance was fairly distributed.

The question 'How can we hold families together in a world that's pulling them apart?' is one that is being asked quite often these days.
- Margaret Birch

It was often stated that both business and labour could be more supportive of the family, more family-oriented in their decisions, and more aware of the family's needs in relation to work requirements. Industry can demand too much of employees, to the detriment of family life, to which shift work, for instance, can be damaging. Long hours, constant pressure, sudden transfers, and relocation do not usually promote the well-being of the family. Labour unions do not always consider family concerns when bargaining, sometimes putting wage levels before everything else.

It was suggested that employers could do more to make their employees aware of company benefits available to them and of government programs such as premium assistance under OHIP. It was proposed that corporations could employ counsellors and social workers for such purposes.

Jobsharing, flexible work hours, and leave-of-absence for a parent to accommodate family care and responsibilities are positive steps. Part-time work benefits those who wish to re-enter the work force gradually and parents who must work but also wish to spend time with their children. Shared employment and provision for paid work to be done in the home help those who must combine family support with family care. Particular concern was shown for the plight of the unskilled worker.

At the same time it was noted that bankruptcy laws, often seen by families as affording an easy way out of financial distress, should be made tighter and involve more family counselling.

Adolescents who do not find work, do not establish a steady work record, and do not earn employment and social security benefits will not be in a position to support a family when they are socially and psychologically ready to do so.
- Ralph Garber

Single-industry towns

Participants in the North Bay and Thunder Bay conferences emphasized that families in single-industry towns feel particularly insecure. There is always a fear that the main industry will close down and no alternative employment will be available. Families in such environments usually lack the support of their extended families and friends and sometimes are without medical and family support services. Alcoholism and drug-related problems can be widespread.

It was felt that industry and labour need to give greater consideration to the special problems of families in such towns. Though corporate decisions tend to be made in distant head offices, the company could have a policy of sponsoring community family events and could help fund organizations and facilities in the community that support families. Urban development in these towns might be co-operatively planned by government, industry, labour, and the inhabitants; the evolution of a community plan was thought to be especially important.

FAMILY RESOURCES

Supporting agencies

Workshop discussions pointed to a need to develop a comprehensive social policy for the family and to encourage communication between all the different family-assisting agencies, organizations, and programs. A community planning agency could provide leadership for all the family services in any given community, helping families with problems find the best program available. It was felt that government should act as a facilitator, linking people with services and helping to relate the various agencies. Although confidentiality was acknowledged to be a problem in certain cases, it was felt that if more than one agency is involved with a family they should work together with family members to help resolve difficulties.

If we really believe in family life and its importance, then we must be ready to support policies that will enrich and enhance family life.
- *Frank Turner*

Agencies such as those concerned with child welfare, family counselling, and mental health receive funding from the government to help them provide the type of support families need. Workshop participants recommended that their services be improved and made more flexible and noted that support programs should be funded on a long-term basis, not just to get the program started. It was frequently noted that the functions performed by volunteer, charitable, and self-help groups were invaluable. The active commitment of churches to strengthening family life in our society was continually referred to. It was widely believed that business and labour too could have a profound effect on family life through their decisions on working conditions.

The answer to all problems isn't more social services - the answer isn't to be found only in government, or in the churches, or in any other of society's institutions. The answer is, of course, at the core of each family.
- Margaret Birch

Access to information

Overall, it was apparent that families are often unaware of the programs and services that exist to help them. They may not know what government and non-government groups have to offer, or how to go about getting services. They may not know that financial aid is available, much less where to apply for it. They may hesitate reporting abuse of a child, not knowing how police and agencies will follow through and fearing that their name will be publicized. They may have difficulty finding help in a crisis, contacting numerous agencies before giving up in frustration. Many participants believed that too often a trial-and-error approach happens as agencies 'pass the buck'.

The discussion groups agreed that the general public needs to know what is available. Participants expressed concern that information reach all ethno-cultural groups and also the less articulate members of society. Even community groups and agencies need more information about what is available in the way of financial assistance, grants and loans for families, and family-related assistance programs.

Quality refers to the level of expertise applied, the resource readily available, the humane responsiveness of caregivers, the minimal bureaucratic interference with care being offered, the wide range of options of care offered, the aesthetics of the care

situation being deemed as important, and so on. Quality seems an extravagance only if no one has experienced it.
- Ralph Garber

It was felt that information centres, established in some but not all communities, were needed to list all the available family services and direct families to the proper resource.

A directory of services and agencies in a city or area could be given to every family. (An example is a 'Parents Handbook' published by the London Information Bureau.) Current information could be published and mailed throughout a local area concerning facilities, community projects, and special programs of interest to families.

Radio and television could be used to help make people aware of available resources. Commercials could let families know where help can be obtained in a crisis.

Participants suggested that community groups that support families, especially churches, should become more visible to the community by holding 'open houses' and by their volunteer efforts.

Access to services

Workshop participants, particularly those from rural and remote communities, often mentioned the lack of support services for families in their areas. It was noted that gaps in service exist not only between northern and southern Ontario but also between regions.

Yet local services must exist if a disabled child is to be supported in the home, or if alcohol and drug-related problems are to be successfully treated. Conference participants felt that services should be available to all families in need, not only to those in urban centres, and that the availability of programs should be related to the needs of the

community, not to its size.

Participants suggested that government could help northern and small communities by encouraging professionals to work there (by subsidizing speech therapists to move north, for example), and that social service, community activities, and such issues of family concern as movie censorship be determined at the local level rather than in Toronto.

We are left with a dream to be aspired to and a reality to be responded to. The reality is the housing, jobs, schooling, health, leisure, family relationship, children's welfare, taxes, incomes that together and separately constitute the way we act our days. It is to these present concerns that we have to turn our energies and create our social policies.
- Ralph Garber

The role of volunteers

In any family-support program there should be both professional and community involvement, and it was repeatedly noted that community volunteers are extremely important. Volunteers help professionals in family-support programs; they help families needing assistance in their home. In certain situations, particularly in family programs of a preventive nature, volunteers are very helpful (more so than professionals, many noted), and it was suggested that the professional, such as the social worker, should adopt a supportive, guiding role.

Some participants felt that the present generation tends to be materialistic, adopting the position that work not paid for is not worthwhile. It was suggested that 'old guard' volunteers try to draw newcomers into volunteer work. Family members, including teenagers and senior citizens, could be encouraged to volunteer help. Business might be

encouraged to support and promote volunteer work, allowing employees to participate by making it possible for them to attend meetings and functions that may be held during working hours. Volunteer work should be recognized as experience in the search for jobs.

Volunteer groups need more support. In general, the image of volunteers could be improved, and professionals could be encouraged to view them as a necessary and worthwhile resource.

Humane responses, voluntarily undertaken, are the hallmarks of a healthy society.
- Ralph Garber

The helping hand: intervention or interference?

In many of the groups the topic of intervention was mentioned, leading to a discussion of the fine distinction between intervention and interference. Intervention at a time of crisis or emergency was felt to be desirable; interference was not.

Assistance often leads to dependence, and it was suggested that government programs need to encourage family independence. If there is always someone there to help, the family does not have to make its own decisons; the supports that are necessary to promote independence are often not available.

In essence, I am asking: Who decides for families? I think it should be families themselves.
- Margaret Birch

The danger of 'professionalization' is that it is all too easy to lose sight of the context in which we are working. The temptation is to cart off the phenomenon to a treatment centre, iron out those little

human foibles that don't fit the rational model, and then return with a nice round peg and try and fit it in that jagged uneven hole. My feeling is that we must do less of the 'carting off' and be more willing to deal with those jagged uneven holes that define the context in which human relationships grow. This means viewing the professional as ancillary to, rather than as a substitute for, the resources of the family.
- Keith Norton

Many group participants expressed the view that agencies have tended to usurp the role of parents and that the primary authority needs to be returned to the family. All members of the family, for instance, should be able to question the advice given by professionals because some problems are better dealt with at home. The family needs to be encouraged to act on its own, and the delicate decision of when to intervene must be continually reviewed, allowing the family unit to be respected and not severed unless absolutely necessary.

The Child Welfare Act protects children, for example, but when should the state intervene and when should it stay out? Although the needs of children are often independent from those of the parents, a constant focus on the rights of children tends to diminish the rights of the family. It was felt that the situation should be desperate before children are removed from a home and that authorities intervene too much in this respect.

It has been my experience that families want to be independent, to be in control of their lives, to make their own choices. There are times, however, when outside help must be sought. How can this help be given without taking away the independence that families value? How can families make choices

in seeking help? How can the help given lead to valued independence and not to unwelcome dependency? When should we have the courage to intervene or the wisdom not to?
- Margaret Birch

Giving families government financial support to care for disabled members with special needs at home was one solution. Communities pooling their resources in order to be better able to help themselves and as much as possible avoid government involvement is another. Taking steps to avert family breakdown before it occurs is especially important.

Prevention

Agencies tend to assist only when families are in serious difficulty. As one of the participants said: 'If you are really in trouble you will get help, but if you are just managing, forget it!' Some noted that there can be so much red tape involved that when help does become available the problem is beyond repair.

Can we turn to institutions, government, employers, and ask them to make the world safe for the family? Today we have demonstrated a significant and important awareness that that won't work.
- Alan Thomas

Preventive programs can help keep a family together, and for this reason it was felt that emphasis should be on preventive measures rather than on band-aid cures after the family has broken down. Assisting before the fact rather than after, preventive rather than remedial services should be made available. Family planning for young people, marriage counselling before marriage, conciliation counselling before or during a separation, counselling

before a second relationship or marriage takes place (including the children in the process), and counselling in parenting skills and helping families deal with the normal day-to-day problems of child rearing were all suggested as effective preventive programs.

In effect, it was believed that all types of counselling are beneficial. Agencies such as the Children's Aid Societies and probation programs could publicize their services more fully. Community efforts need encouragement, sometimes in the form of financial aid.

To prevent an unnecessary family breakup can represent generations of saved human potential and the avoidance of real economic loss to society.
- Frank Turner

In developing new programs that focus on preventive rather than remedial measures, it was felt, the government should look at both 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' families. Professionals could be trained in counselling for the prevention of long-term dependency, particularly financial. Hospitals could be given the responsibility of identifying high-risk mothers and children, with follow-up to come from public health staff. Professional counsellors helping families in difficult situations could utilize volunteers who have experienced similar problems, encouraging people to help each other.

It was recognized that a preventive approach to social problems requires time. A social worker carrying a large case load can find it hard to do a thorough and sensitive job. Workers in institutions for children often do not have the time to cope in a caring manner with the overwhelming problems they face. Because of this, in part, families receiving help are sometimes made to feel less important than the agency staff and the services provided. Social service agencies can have a harsh, uncaring

public image that sometimes makes families afraid to become involved with them.

We wish to encourage perceptions of social services as a tool for maintaining family stability, rather than entering the fray at the last minute and trying to return the family to stability.
- Keith Norton

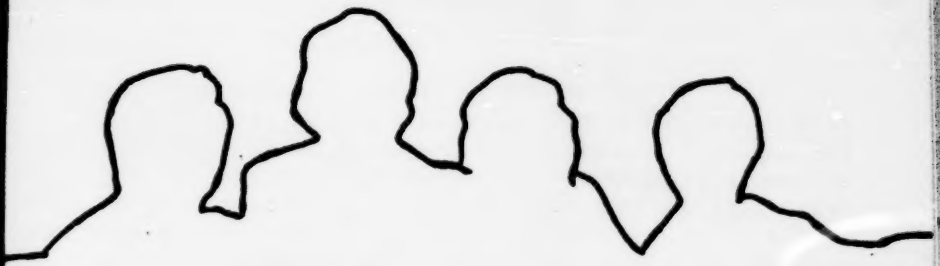
Some stigma is attached to acknowledging a need for help, and the dignity of the family members suffers. Ideally, social service agencies would focus on the family, so that the difficulties of the individual might be seen in relation to the total family environment.

When the association concerned with human problems is forced to make efficiency more important than effectiveness, not only will there be neglect of less measurable activities ... but public education will be replaced by public relations and image manipulation will displace goal-directed action.
- Janet Maclachlan

Effective professionals help parents develop self-confidence and so improve their relationship with their children. The emphasis in all the group discussions was that families need to be helped to find their own solutions, that the family's responsibility for the welfare of its members must be strengthened rather than weakened.

What I have in mind is the need to encourage professionals to see themselves not only as problem-solvers but also as teachers and facilitators of healthy functioning.
- Frank Turner

One of many enthusiastic families arriving for the North Bay conference



ON THE FAMILY

excerpts from the speeches of the conference leaders

WHAT IS A FAMILY?

Alan Thomas: When we say 'family', what do we mean? I think we are not sure about that, but have a strong feeling that it is real just the same.

Keith Norton: The essence of family is the willingness to contribute part of one's self to a greater whole, to join your identity with that of others, to grow 'with' one another and decide a course in life together, not separately.

Janet Maclachlan: The family is rapidly becoming the only institution in an increasingly impersonal world where each person is loved not for what he does or makes, but simply because he is.

Jack Burghardt: What constitutes a family? The employer speaks of his office staff as 'one big happy family'. The theologian (with biblical warrant) refers to the church as the 'family of God'. Is it any group animated by a friendly attitude, an esprit de corps? An adolescent or young adult, alienated from his parents, as many are at some time or other, may turn to the other persons or group with whom he feels he can be himself and say about them, 'here is my real family'. There is some justification for saying that our family exists where we feel at home, where there are people who affirm us as authentic selves. But we must remind ourselves that we also belong to a larger family than our family of origin. Just by living in a community we are part of the community of families.

Frank Turner: Thus in recent years we have begun to appreciate the real meaning of the term 'the family of man'. We are all members of our own family. We have all become members of other extended families through the significant relationships in our lives. But finally, though, we are all truly members of the family of man.

THE FAMILY, PAST AND PRESENT

Frank Turner: We are leaving the decades of the nuclear family and returning to the extended family. In fact, the extended family has been with us much longer than we have acknowledged in recent years; probably our significant family networks have been more extensive than is commonly presented as the nuclear model.

The extended family of the eighties is different in two ways. It is extended not only generationally but also geographically. The various networks of family relationships cover not only all of Canada, but several other countries. Nevertheless, this in no way indicates that these networks are less important, even though they are distant.

A second characteristic of the new extended family is a result of the current high number of remarriages, resulting in what can be called 'reconstituted' families. Such families may well include children from several different unions. Many, and indeed in the future perhaps most family networks will have one or more remarriages within them, creating a complex system of new relationships.

Keith Norton: It seems that family members desire more now to fit their family responsibilities around their personal aspirations rather than tailor their aspirations around their family responsibilities. They are seeking not only the security of the family but also the fulfilment of themselves.

It is the conflict between the rights of the individual and family that characterizes much of the confusion we feel about the family. We see the value of the traditional family as perceived through the generations, but we are at the same time strongly influenced by the desire for personal fulfilment and growth. I think that the new pressure and the new values that have come to act on the family can be largely encapsulated in the term 'individual rights'. Much of the recent change within the family has been toward a greater consideration of its constituent members as independent elements.

We embarked on what American sociologist Tom Wolfe has termed the 'Me Decade' of the seventies complete with the rejection of all that we perceived to detract from the goal of individual freedom and the individual's needs. The family became a kind of obstacle in the eyes of some ...

(Today) families want help to strike a balance between the traditional values we wish to celebrate and the legitimate claims of individual goals ... Our task, not as government but as a society ... becomes one of finding ways in which the individual can become strong <u>because</u> of the family and not at the expense of the family.

<u>Lucien A. Beaulieu</u>: The family today is basically viewed in terms of father, mother, and unmarried children living together. In increasing instances we have one parent with the children. We no longer have a 'family' which includes grandparents, uncles, aunts, as well as parents and children - little of the 'extended' family. In terms of individual roles, expectations and adaptations, the implications may be far-reaching ...

In the past, the child received socialization from his family including grandparents and other relatives. Because today's family is small, the child needs non-family socialization to compensate. In the past, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins handled closely the transition to active outside socialization. Today's small mobile family must make a conscious effort to ensure that their children become involved with family and friends. In the past, involvement with children and family was natural because children were 'assets'. Today, children are more likely to be seen as 'liabilities'.

Margaret Birch: Today's family is being besieged by both internal and external stresses and strains.

The list of these tensions is long: changing values, financial problems, lack of communication, and abandonment of responsibility are just a few of the problems which come to mind.

And the list of consequences is equally long: violence in the family, the rapid increase in divorce rates, teenage pregnancies and suicides, alcoholism, and a high degree of disillusionment ...

Single-parent families

At the present time, there are more than 200 000 single-parent families in Ontario with responsibility for 251 000 dependent children under the age of 18.

Fully 83 per cent of single-parent families are being led by women and more than half of these require public assistance in order to carry on.

Of these one-parent families nearly 7 per cent are unmarried women. A great many are teenagers who have decided to keep their children.

Working couples

Recent statistics indicate that almost half of all mothers with school-aged children work outside the home, and over half of all Ontario families have both spouses working.

My own concern is that women with families should have the opportunity to make a choice. If they wish to work, that's fair enough. But if they prefer to stay at home, they shouldn't

be stigmatized for their choice, or made to feel guilty about their preference to be full-time wives and mothers. We should respect and honour the homemaker just as we respect and honour other groups in society.

If women must work for economic reasons, the challenge then becomes sharing the traditional homemaker responsibilities among all members of the family. Too often we still see working mothers carrying two full-time jobs. The question in my mind is how the family of the eighties can adjust to the reality of the working mother by adopting new ways of carrying out family responsibilities.

Family trends

There are actually more people now living in a family situation than there used to be. Not only are there more people getting married for the first time these days, but there are more people remarrying and forming blended or 'reconstituted' families ... Despite the overall decline in birth rates, families are still choosing to have children, although fewer than they used to. These trends reaffirm society's apparently deeply felt belief that living in families is both positive and desirable.

WILL THE FAMILY SURVIVE?

Janet Maclachlan: We are aware of the fact that economic, social, and political conditions facing the family often condemn it to a bitter struggle for its day-to-day survival. The 'success' of a genuine family life does not come in a ready-made form; rather, it is achieved through constant struggle. As is the case with any other sort of undertaking,

so too with the family: nothing worthwhile is ever attained unless people are willing to work for it.

Frank Turner: The most critical characteristic of family life, as a social system, is its flexibility. The family has survived and will continue to survive because of its ability to shift and alter its structure and function to respond appropriately and effectively to societal changes and to the needs of individuals. We have often mistakenly viewed changes that were taking place as family breakdown when frequently these changes were signs of adaptability and strength.

Keith Norton: Like all social institutions, the family changes to reflect the currently held values of society while it struggles to retain the core values that have been passed down through generations.

Margaret Birch: It is important to keep in mind that the family has never achieved a blissful state of stability and perfection - we all have our ups and downs. Families have always grown, changed, and struggled to adapt to the internal and external stresses and strains, enjoying successes as well as coping with failures.

Yet the family has survived, and its very survival, I believe, stems from its flexibility. That's why I'm so absolutely certain that, as a social institution, the family will continue to be the cornerstone of society in the years to come. Its survival instinct and its proven ability to adapt will stand it in very good stead in the face of new challenges.

THE FAMILY'S RESPONSIBILITY

Lucien A. Beaulieu: With the increased absence of the extended family, government and society are expected to perform functions previously belonging to the family - economic, educational, and recreational. Functions of nurture, child care, and child's rights are also being discussed. These functions may not necessarily all be quantifiable, manageable by administrators, and capable of being performed by people who are interchangeable ... In human affairs it is difficult to separate who performs the function from the function itself ...

In our haste to assist, we must be careful that we do not do things 'to' people and 'for' people rather than encourage self-determination. No doubt the former is easier ...

The biggest danger we must guard against is that we do not, in our system of assistance, reinforce, in those people we are attempting to help, the feeling that they indeed are inadequate, incomplete persons - that they cannot function without outside and direct assistance. There must be greater concrete evidence of our faith in their relative ability to do things on their own - even with less than ideal success. Supplementing their efforts is one thing, substituting for them is another. There is a danger that we expect the government, and the courts, to solve too many problems that are capable of personal and family solution.

Keith Norton: I conceive of the family as being the appropriate instrument for social policy. It is normally the family that does know best the needs of the individual, the unique circumstances of the setting,

or the peculiarities of the context ...

In the future we must go further, we must recognize fully that families are the guardians. They are the ones who have the tools at their disposal for appropriate action on social issues ... What we must get across is that the task of social 'service' is a task that falls squarely in the lap of the family, not because the government does not want the responsibility but because the government does not have the tools or knowledge at its disposal to take on that responsibility.

The family has the best chance of finding that jagged peg to fit that jagged hole. Government will continue to provide regulation-size pegs only because it can never accumulate that wealth of information that resides in the family. We are dependent upon the guidance which the family can extend to us.

THE FAMILY AND SOCIETY

Janet Maclachlan: The family in the past was a stable unit in which the survival of the individual was on the whole guaranteed. Basic values were transmitted from one generation to the next. The family itself was held in high regard by society.

The family today has witnessed great changes ... Confronted by new situations in the fields of labour, housing, income, and leisure, the relationship between the family and society has completely changed ...

Society is no longer organized in terms of the family and its needs, but rather in terms of individuals' economic progress or industrial imperatives. Yet the family plays an essential role with respect to the children who are part of it, a role that no adminis-

tration, however warm and attentive, can adequately play. Thus the family remains the most adequate social structure for bearing and raising children, constituting an irreplaceable emotional environment for nurturing children and for lavishing upon them, through all kinds of care, the tenderness and warmth that are necessary for mental equilibrium and psychological development.

Jack Burghardt: The family is deeply influenced by its surroundings. However hard we try to insulate it, it cannot be a world unto itself ... How can a family learn to filter the values of society that influence all of its members? And values today, in my mind, have become confused. In many cases, we are unable to distinguish between bigness and greatness, success and achievement, a standard of living and the quality of life, the price of something and the value of anything. We measure life by its duration - perhaps we should measure it by its depth. We count success in terms of how much or how many - perhaps we should think in terms of how completely. We concern ourselves with getting - perhaps we should look at giving, without counting the cost.

Keith Norton: Our experience of family life shapes and informs our adult lives. The family is also the forum in which we first encounter our culture and society.

Lucien A. Beaulieu: The family is the heart of society. Its role is to ensure the existence of a healthy society by providing it with reliable, effective and stable individuals ... While the family's structure and function may have and may continue to undergo changes,

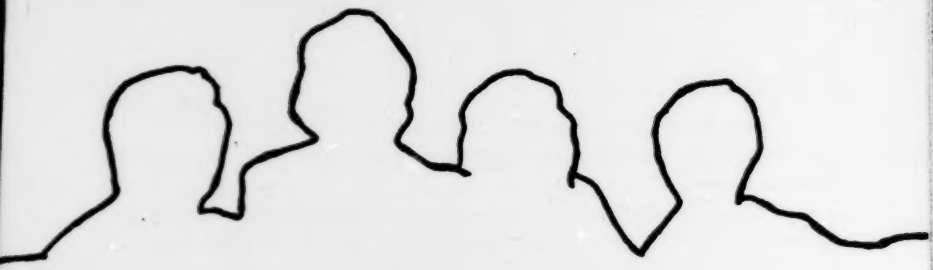
it has been and remains a cornerstone of society. Some have likened it to a nursery school in which tomorrow's men and women obtain the prerequisites of maturity and responsibility, and in which the child can learn from the example of the parents' words, actions, and attitudes.

Keith Norton: An enduring concept of family is necessary to the stability of our society.

Ralph Garber: Families that have kith and kin, that is, friends and neighbours who by affinity are like family and relatives, also offer mutual supports that are irreplaceable.

Margaret Birch: The family's survival is also crucial to the survival of society as a whole. The family's unique ability to nurture and support its members, to foster caring and sharing, and to instil social and life skills which will enable our children to carry on as responsible adults and parents themselves is a fundamental goal which we must continually strive to achieve.

Mrs Birch and Jim Clark meeting participants at the Kingston conference



FURTHER INITIATIVES SUPPORTIVE OF FAMILY LIFE

The Secretariat for Social Development has encouraged community organizations across the province to sponsor local discussions about various aspects of family life; the following are examples:

The Children's Aid Society of Hamilton-Wentworth held a meeting on 31 May 1980, on the subject of 'The family in the eighties'. Nine different discussion groups on various topics were held.

The North York Interagency Council held a seminar on 'The family in North York' on 26 April 1980. Mrs Birch was the keynote speaker at this event, and five discussion groups were organized on the following subjects: family and neighbourhood, the family and the school, ethnic diversity of the family, violence in the family, and faith and the family.

Many Catholic Women's League organizations, both parish and diocesan, discussed the subject of the family in 1980 and 1981. All these meetings utilized the material on the family made available by the Secretariat.

The Peterborough Social Planning Council held two meetings in 1980, on 'Joy of family' and on 'Remarriage'.

The Provincial Council of Women, with the co-operation of the local councils of women, is holding discussions on the family at the local level during 1981. For example, the Local Council of Women in Niagara Falls organized a panel discussion on 'Helping families to stay together when the world is pulling them apart' on 26 February 1981; the Local Council of Women in Peterborough organized a discussion at their general meeting on 'The family' on 19 March; and the Local Council of Women in Ottawa held a meeting on 11 April on 'Inflation and the family'.

The Multicultural Centre in Scarborough organized a conference on 3 April 1981 at the Scarborough Civic Centre on the theme of 'Family life: issues and life-styles in a multicultural society'. The conference focused on the single-parent family, family patterns, and lifestyles.

On 1 and 2 May 1981 a seminar on the family was conducted by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Etobicoke, reflecting the importance of the family as an institution in the view of the Mormon Church.

The following are some government initiatives in areas identified as important by the participants at the family conferences:

Day care

On 18 December 1980 the Minister of Community and Social Services announced a number of new day care initiatives involving about a 30 per cent increase in provincial funding for day care programs beginning 1 April 1981. Areas of emphasis include public information, level of service, pilot and demonstration projects, and capital assistance.

Perinatal programs

On 13 February 1981 the Minister of Health announced plans to spend $15 million over the next five years to establish regional programs across the province enhancing the care provided for mother and baby before, during, and after birth. Areas of emphasis are education of women of child-bearing age and treatment of high-risk mothers and newborns.

Intergenerational programs

In the spring of 1981 the Ministry of Education promoted the concept of intergenerational programs in high schools throughout the province. The Ministry encouraged school boards to undertake such programs. The Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens also promoted this initiative in the quarterly newsletter 'Especially for Seniors', which goes to all senior citizens in the province. Areas of emphasis include seniors both as a curriculum resource and as learners and school-age children both providing services to the elderly and being involved in out-of-school learning.

Special education

On 2 December 1980 the Legislature amended the Education Act to ensure that every exceptional pupil in Ontario receives an education suited to his or her needs and abilities. Universal access, provision of special education services, and involvement of parents or guardians are emphasized.

Parenting brochures

In 1977 the Ministry of Community and Social Services began the publication of a series of pamphlets and brochures to assist families with their parenting and family skills. Additional pamphlets were produced

during the latter part of 1980 and in January 1981. They are available free of charge from the regional offices of the Ministry as well as from the communications branch of the Ministry at Queen's Park.

Today is only a beginning. Tomorrow holds an even greater challenge. I urge you to go back to your own communities and continue the work we've started here.
- Margaret Birch

APPENDIX: CONFERENCE PROGRAMS AND SPEAKERS

TORONTO, 24 SEPTEMBER 1979: 'THINK ABOUT THE FAMILY'

Co-chairmen

The Honourable Margaret Birch,
Provincial Secretary for Social Development

His Honour Judge Guy Goulard,
President, Ontario Welfare Council

Keynote address: 'Towards a family policy'
Dean Ralph Garber, Faculty of Social Work,
University of Toronto

Luncheon speaker: 'Government and the family'
The Honourable Keith Norton,
Minister of Community and Social Services

Workshops

Learning in the family; Family health; Family income; Families, housing and community; Social and recreation needs of families; Families have older members; The child in the family; The handicapped live in families; The single parent family; Family members adapt to cultural differences; French language workshops: family members; the family and the community.

KINGSTON, 1 DECEMBER 1979:
'A DAY TO TALK ABOUT FAMILIES'

Co-chairmen
The Honourable Margaret Birch
Jim Clark, Alderman, City of Kingston

Keynote address: 'The family'
His Honour Senior Judge Lucien A. Beaulieu,
Provincial Court (Family Division), Toronto

Luncheon speaker: 'People, places, provisions'
Janet Maclachlan, Queen's University

Plenary session: Discussion group reports
Lin Good, Associate Librarian,
Douglas Library, Queen's University

Discussion groups

The single parent family - one in ten; Let's talk about success; How do families adapt to cultural differences?; Families grow old; Value conflicts in families; What should the rights and responsibilities of families be?; How should we learn parenting skills?; The family within the community; How is the media affecting families?; Intervention in the family; How does the law affect the family?; The family and the community: a better alternative than institutions; Discussion in the French language; Other personal concerns.

LONDON, 12 APRIL 1980:
'THE FAMILY - SOCIETY'S FORTRESS'

Co-chairmen

The Honourable Margaret Birch
Annabelle Logan, London, Ontario

Keynote address: 'New ways of strengthening family life'
Dr Frank Turner, Vice President,
Laurentian University, Sudbury

Luncheon speaker: 'The family in the community'
Jack Burghardt, CFPL-TV, London

Discussion groups

The handicapped as members of their family and community; Income and its effect on the family; Do our laws help or hinder the family unit?; Parents, young people and society - working together?; Combining employment and parenting; The elderly in the community; Responsibilities of government, business and labour to the family; Young adolescent parents; Managing the blended family; New ways of growing together; La famille et ses membres; La famille et la communauté.

THUNDER BAY, 3 MAY 1980: 'SURVIVAL THROUGH THE FAMILY'

Co-chairmen

The Honourable Margaret Birch
Mary Lou Curtis, Thunder Bay

Keynote address: 'The family as a focus for social policy'
Margaret Birch

Closing session

Report from the Discussion Groups,
Dr Alan Thomas, OISE, Toronto

Discussion groups

His, hers, and ours - the blended family; How one-parent families cope; Family survival in single industry towns; Bridging the gap between new values and traditional ideals; Families with special needs; How does the law serve the family?; Drugs, alcohol and other mind-benders; Sharing family roles - working couples; Kids: we're part of the family too.

NORTH BAY, 14 JUNE 1980:
'FOCUS ON THE FAMILY/LA FAMILLE CHEZ NOUS'

Co-chairmen
The Honourable Margaret Birch
Marie Marchand, North Bay

Keynote address: 'Focus on the family'
His Honour Senior Judge Lucien A. Beaulieu
Provincial Court (Family Division), Toronto

Panel discussion: Community programs for families

Discussion groups

Managing stress within the family; Access to community resources for families; Family survival in single industry communities; Being a good neighbour - what can I do to help?; Strengthening ties between family members - leisure, communications, culture, religion; Bridging the gaps between parent and child; How does the law serve the family?

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Toronto, Ontario M7A 1N8

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ISBN 0-7743-6317-7
20M May 1981
Family Unity Month

ISBN 0-7743-6317-7